

# The Story of Vaccination

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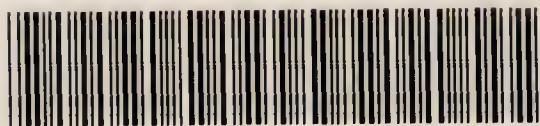
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## THE STORY OF VACCINATION.

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**T**HIS year, 1896, is called the Jenner Centenary, because it is exactly a hundred years since the discovery of vaccination, as the great preservative against the smallpox, by Dr. Edward Jenner. In order to understand its importance, we shall have to look back and try to realise the state of things in the days before this event.

I have myself been told in my youth, by old people who could remember it, that ‘no one could tell what vaccination had done for the country, who could not remember the terrible sights that were formerly so common: people so disfigured as to be quite repulsive, and not to be looked on without a feeling of disgust, and many hopelessly blind, from the effects of smallpox.’

In support of this, I quote the following passage from the Jenner Centenary number of the *British Medical Journal*, headed ‘An inevitable accident of human life’:—

‘In the ninth century, Isaac Judæus wrote of it as a universal misfortune. Rhases invented a theory to explain “why hardly any escape it,” and particularly “why children, especially males,

rarely escape being seized with the disease." . . . . In 1747, Mead refers to the fact that it had been found by experience that nobody was seized with the smallpox a second time, and that scarce one in a thousand escaped having it once; and Dr. Black wrote, "Very few of the human species escape the smallpox, especially in populous towns and cities;" and "A mere handful of the native progeny of the metropolis can be supposed to have escaped an infection with which they are constantly enveloped;" and Sir Gilbert Blane told a Committee of the House of Commons that, at the end of the last century, an adult person who had not had the smallpox was scarcely to be met with or heard of in the United Kingdom.' Indeed, there still exists in an old newspaper an advertisement for the discovery of a malefactor who had escaped the hands of justice, and who is described as 'not being pock-marked,' this being, apparently, so rare as likely to lead to his being identified. And smallpox caused the death of our Queen Mary the Second, and of many other crowned and royal personages.

At last, however, in the year 1717, a remedy was discovered, which prevailed for some time, and may have led the way to the greatly improved safeguard afterwards brought out by Dr. Jenner.

Lady Mary Wortley Montague, the wife of the then British ambassador at Constantinople, a clever and remarkable woman, became acquainted there with the process of 'inoculation,' which was practised in the East very generally, and with great success. In the following letter (which I copy from the same journal as the foregoing statements) she gives the particulars to a friend):—

'*A propos* of distempers, I am going to tell you of a thing that I am sure will make you wish yourself here. The smallpox, so general and so fatal among us, is entirely harmless here by the invention of engrafting, which is the term they give it here. There is a set of old women, who make it their business to perform the operation in the month of September, when the great heat is abated. People send to one another to know if any of their family has a mind to have the smallpox? They make parties for the purpose, and when they are met—commonly fifteen or sixteen together—the old woman comes with a nutshell full of the best sort of smallpox, and asks what vein you will please to have opened? She immediately rips open the one that you offer to her with a large needle, which gives you no more pain than a common scratch, and puts into the vein as much venom as can lie upon the head

of her needle, and after, binds up the little wound with a hollow bit of shell ; and in this manner opens four or five veins. The Grecians have commonly the superstition of opening one in the middle of the forehead, and in each arm and on the breast, to make the sign of the Cross ; but this has a very ill effect, all the wounds leaving little scars ; and it is not done by those who are not superstitious, who choose to have them in the legs or in that part of the arm that is concealed. The children, or young patients, play together all the rest of the day, and are in perfect health till the eighth ; then the fever begins to seize them, and they keep their beds two days—very seldom three. They have very rarely above twenty or thirty in their faces, which never mark ; and in eight days' time are as well as before their illness. Where they are wounded, there remain running sores during their distemper, which, I doubt not, is a great relief of it. Every year thousands undergo this operation ; and the French Ambassador says that they take the smallpox here by way of diversion, as they take the waters in other countries. There is no example of any one that has died in it ; and you may believe I am very well satisfied of the safety of the experiment, since I intend to try it on my dear little son. I am patriot enough to take pains to



bring this useful invention into fashion in England.'

'Maitland, the surgeon to the British Embassy, inoculated Lady Mary's son in 1717. Her infant daughter was inoculated in England in 1721, the event exciting the greatest interest in fashionable, as well as in medical, circles. It was not, however, till the method had been successfully tried on some condemned criminals in Newgate, that people's minds were reassured as to the safety of the practice. In 1722 the Princess of Wales had her two daughters inoculated, and this went far to remove prejudice. Still, however, there was a great deal of opposition to inoculation. Parsons denounced it as sinful. Doctors called it "an artificial way of depopulating a country," and "a barbarous and dangerous invention;" and more temperate controversialists pelted each other with statistics. The practice slowly gained ground, however, and in 1746 a hospital for the inoculation of the poor was established in London. In 1754 two scions of Royalty were inoculated, and the procedure received what may be termed its scientific consecration from the Royal College of Physicians, who issued a declaration in its favour.'\* Inoculation was also

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\* These extracts are taken from the Jenner Centenary Number of the *British Medical Journal*.

soon established in Russia, in North and South America, and the West Indies.

But though inoculation produced in most cases a mild form of the disease, and was generally invaluable as preventing death, blindness, and even permanent disfigurement, it was, nevertheless, a long and rather serious illness ; and had, also, the very important drawback that it was infectious. Severe smallpox might be caught, by any one susceptible to it, from an ordinary case of inoculation ; and it was, therefore, frequently accused of being a means of spreading the complaint, and was finally forbidden by law in consequence.

Great and universal, therefore, was the joy and thankfulness when another remedy was discovered, and found, after many trials, to be a more complete safeguard against the smallpox, while it gave but little inconvenience, and was *not* infectious.

I have said that before this time hardly any one escaped, at some time of their lives, taking the terrible disease, and bearing traces of it, more or less, for ever after. But there was one class of people who *did* escape. It was a fact well known and never disputed in the dairy-farming country that smallpox was never caught by the milkmaids and farming-men who attended upon the cows and milked those who had the



complaint known as 'cowpox,' and which they used to catch on their hands, probably when 'chapped' in cold weather. This attracted the attention of Dr. Edward Jenner, a physician living at Berkeley, in Gloucestershire, where his father was clergyman, and where he practised for many years; being on such terms of intimate acquaintance with the country people, as can only exist where there is mutual goodwill and confidence of long standing.

Dr. Jenner knew 'of his own knowledge' the local tradition that those who had had cowpox never took the smallpox, and the idea struck him that inoculating with the virus of cowpox instead of that of smallpox would answer the same purpose as a safeguard—being, in fact, another form of the same disease, though it would give an immeasurably slighter illness without danger of infection, as cowpox can only be imparted by means of a scratch or sore.

In the year 1796—just a century ago—Dr. Jenner performed the first vaccination, inoculating with cowpox a boy of eight years old, named James Phipps, with matter taken from the hand of Sarah Nelmes, a dairymaid, who had become infected by milking her master's cows. This was in May, and the following July he inoculated the same boy with smallpox, *and no disease followed.* Having been vaccinated,

*he could not be made to have the smallpox.* (N.B. It is satisfactory to know that Dr. Jenner took this boy under his protection afterwards, and ultimately built him a house and stocked his garden for him.) Similar experiments were tried again and again with the same results, till the neighbouring country people crowded to Dr. Jenner's house to be vaccinated, and brought their children for the same purpose. He was a good and charitable man, whom they knew and trusted, and thus he was able to prove the experiment to his complete satisfaction. Its fame gradually spread far and wide. He made public his discovery at once, and was made one of the first Fellows of the Medical and Chirurgical Society. He was urged to leave Berkeley and settle in London, but he loved his native place and preferred to remain there; and there he lived and died, with the exception of five years' residence at Cheltenham. But his discovery, once proved and established, spread like wildfire, not in Great Britain only, but over the whole civilised world, and was eagerly and thankfully welcomed as a great deliverance from the terrible scourge which had devastated mankind for centuries. The *Medical Journal* says that 'Though honours fell thickly upon him at home, his reputation was still greater abroad. On more than one occasion he was

the means of obtaining the release of Englishmen detained in captivity abroad. With Napoleon he was a great favourite. On one occasion Jenner petitioned him to allow two friends to return to England. Napoleon was about to refuse the petition, when Josephine (his wife) reminded him that it was from Jenner. "Ah!" said the Emperor; "Jenner! we can refuse nothing to that man."

The vaccination of infants has been established by law in England since 1871, and the rate of smallpox has steadily decreased, especially amongst children, so that its horrors have been almost forgotten. In consequence, an objection to vaccination has been raised; people do not know the evils from which they are delivered by it, and have greatly exaggerated the ills that may now and then result in special cases where it has been performed.

Sad to say, in no place have these objections been more largely promulgated than in the capital city of Dr. Jenner's own county—in Gloucester itself—round the beautiful Cathedral where his statue stands, a conspicuous object, near the west door. Truly, 'a prophet is not without honour save in his own country;' great is the ingratitude, and bitter indeed has been the penalty. In this very year of the 'Jenner Centenary,' an outbreak of smallpox, more ter-

rible than any that has been known for a century, has broken out in Gloucester, and has laid low nearly 2000 people out of a population of about 40,000. The place has been entirely 'boycotted' by the country round; no villagers would receive a Gloucester person into their houses, and no one would deal with the Gloucester shops. It will be many years, if ever, that the commercial prosperity can be restored, and many tradespeople will be ruined. But the triumph of vaccination is more clearly shown than ever.

A Committee was appointed in April to carry out house-to-house vaccination and re-vaccination as far as possible.

*Not one recently vaccinated person* has taken the disease; not one of all the devoted clergy, doctors, and nurses, who have for the last three or four months lived more or less in the small-pox hospitals, has fallen a victim; while those only vaccinated in infancy seldom have had the worst kind of smallpox, which often entails loss of sight; as, alas! several poor, unvaccinated children have done, beyond all hope of cure from English or German oculists.

Unhappily the Gloucester guardians have, till quite lately, allowed the law to lapse, and have not enforced vaccination; and the anti-vaccinationists have made a regular propaganda in the town, though of late many have—too



late !—confessed their mistake, and have been vaccinated with their families.

It must be explained that infant vaccination is not enough to secure the person through life. The dairymaids, who first discovered the saving power of cowpox, were of course *grown up* when they milked the cows and caught it ; and the safeguard to the child is not strong enough to protect the added size and force of the man : added to the fact, now known to doctors, that our bodies are continually changing year by year. Every one, therefore, ought to be re-vaccinated (if he has not been done within seven years or so) when smallpox comes near, and he is then safe.

I have related this history in the hope of laying the importance of vaccination before the whole Girls' Friendly Society, because I write from my own personal knowledge, as well as with medical authority and approval. Gloucester is one of the two great Cathedral cities of the diocese which I represent on the G.F.S. Council, and its sorrows and sufferings—the result of its own folly in disregarding the antidote given by a-merciful God—have affected me very deeply, while Berkeley, where Dr. Jenner lived and practised, is in the Dursley Rural Deanery Branch, of which I have been Secretary seventeen years. The dairymaids, of whom I have



told you, would, if living, now be G.F.S. Members of my Branch, as several of the Nelmes family are, and have been. My relations knew Dr Jenner, and I have known some of his descendants. I earnestly hope that these words of mine may lead to his glorious discovery being more valued, and that, if anything is said against it, two things may be remembered :—

1. That the charges against it are, in most cases, untrue.

2. That, even if true, they are a thousand times better than a revival of that terrible and most infectious disease, the awful ravages of which will leave traces for years to come on the inhabitants of Gloucester.

ANNABELLA MARIA BROWNE,

*G.F.S. President for Gloucester and Bristol.*

*May, 1896.*

N.B.—This paper has been revised by Dr. Arthur Campbell, the medical officer for the district, who approves of what I have said, and to whose kindness I owe the perusal of the *British Medical Journal*.

*August 18th.*—The Report of the Gloucester Vaccination Committee just issued says that ‘Gloucester is now one of the best vaccinated towns in the kingdom.’ No cases of smallpox have occurred for three weeks, and the city has a clean bill of health.



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